11/27/60

THE YEAR WAS 553 B.C. THE PLACE THE ANCIENT EMPIRE OF BABYLON. FOR A WHOLE GENERATION THE ENTIRE JEWISH NATION HAD LIVED IN BABYLON, THEY HAD BEEN CAPTURED, KIDNAPPED FROM ISRAEL AND CARRIED ~~OFF TO BABYLON~~ by the Babylonian soldiers. THE BABYLONIAN RULERS HAD HOPED THAT BY TRANSPORTING THE ENTIRE OPOPULACE TO A FOREIGN SOIL, BY FORCING THEM TO LIVE IN A STRANGE CULTURE WITH STRANGE AND DIFFERENT CUSTOMS THAT THE JEWS WOULD AUTOMATICALLY DISAPPEAR. IT WAS EXPECTED THAT THEY WOULD INTEGRATE WITH THE BABYLONIANS, ADOPT THEIR WAY OF LIFE, INTERMARRY AND BE SLOWLY ENVELOPED BY BABYLON. FINALLY THIS SMALL NATION THAT HAD CAUSED SO MUCH TROUBLE FOR SO MANY AMBITIOUS RULERS WOULD BE GONE, ERASED FOREVER.

BUT THE BABYLONIAN PLOT HAD NOT MATERIALIZED. THE JEWS WERE DETERMINED TO PRESERVE THEIR IDENTITY, THEY DIDN'T ADOPT THE CUSTOMS OF THIS FOREIGN LAND, THEY DIDN'T WORSHIP THE GOD'S OF BABYLON, THEY DIDN'T INTER MARRY TO ANY GREAT EXTENT. THEY WERE STILL JUST A COMMUNITY OF JEWS WAITING FOR THE TIME TO COME FOR THEIR RETURN TO THE HOMELAND. THEY KNEW THAT GOD HAD NOT FORGOTTEN THEM, THEY WERE STILL HIS CHOSEN PEOPLE, IT WAS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME.

BUT THERE WAS ONE QUESTION THAT LOOMED BEFORE THEM ALWAYS. WHY DID THEY HAVE TO SUFFER? GOD LOV ED AND CARED FOR THEM, WHY THEN DID THEY HAVE TO ENDURE THIS EXILE. THIS EXPERIENCE WAS NOT NEW TO THEM, FOR CENTURIED THEY HAD EXISTED IN THE TURMOIL OF BABYLONIAN, ASSYRIAN, PERSIAN AND SYRIAN POWER

STRUGGLES. ONE AFTER ANOTHER THE INVADING ARMIES HAD CONSUMED THEIR TINY LAND. THEY HAD BEEN BEATEN, TORTURED, EXILED, PERSECUTED IN EVERY IMAGINABLE WAY. THEIR TEMPLE HAD BEEN DESECRATED, AND EVEN DESTROYED. ALL THEY COULD ASK WAS WHY? "OF ALL THE NATIONS IN THE WORLD WHY MUST WE ENDURE THIS NEVER ENDING SUFFERING.?"

AS WAS THE CASE THROUGHOUT THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL--WHENEVER A CRISIS OCCURRED, A MAN APPEARED TO LEAD OR GATHER THE PEOPLE TOGETHER. MOSES, SAUL, DAVID AND SOLOMON HAD APPEARED AT CRUCIAL JUNCTURES IN THE PAST. IN THIS AGE, HOWEVER, THE PROPHETS WERE THE MEN OF THE MOMENT. ~~I.E.~~ THE ONES THAT TOOK THE BULL BY THE HORNS, THE ONES THAT PROVIDED THE NECESSARY WARNINGS, PRODDINGS OR ENCOURAGEMENT WHENEVER IT WAS NEEDED. AND IN THIS PARTICULAR INSTANCE THE MAN WAS THE PROPHET ISAIAH. ISAIAH KNEW THE QUESTION THE PEOPLE WERE ASKING, HE TOO MUST HAVE ASKED IT OVER AND OVER AND HE KNEW THE ANSWER. ~~IT WAS NONSENSE TO EVEN ASK WHY~~ / ~~BECAUSE~~ He believed that THE LORD GOD HAD A PURPOSE FOR EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENED. IF ~~HE~~ The Lord WANTED TO HE COULD ANNIHILATE THE ENEMIES OF ISRAEL BUT HE DIDN'T AND THERE WAS A REASON.

THE REASON ~~HE~~ ISAIAH GAVE TO HIS FELLOW ISRAELITES IN CAPTIVITY IS ONE OF THE MOST MOVING AND DEEPLY PASSIONATE CONFESSIONS OF FAITH THE WORLD HAS EVER KNOWN. AS THE CHOSEN ONES OF THE LORD ISRAEL WAS A SUFFERING SERVANT. BY THE R SUFFERING

THEY WERE REVEALING THE WILL AND NATURE OF GOD.

BEGINNING WITH THE FORTIETH CHAPTER OF HIS BOOK ISAIAH EXPLAINS IN A Flowing SMOOTH AND BEAUTIFUL STYLE HOW THE SERVANT MUST SUFFER TO SHOW GOD'S WILL TO THE OTHER NATIONS.

IF ISRAEL WERE A STRONG AND MIGHTY MILITARY POWER, IF THEY SHOULD CONQUER THE WORLD IT WOULD PROVE NOTHING. THIS SORT OF DISPLAY ONLY POINTS TO AN ABUNDANCE OF GOOD SOLDIERS AND GENERALS AND A WEALTH OF RSOURCES. BUT A NATION THAT IS TRODDEN UNDER FOOT, AND YET STILL IS FAITHFUL: A PEOPLE WHO ARE DESPISED BY ALL MEN AND YET LOVE ALL MEN IS SOMETHING DIFFERENT INDEED. A GOD WHO IS STILL PRAISED IN TIME OF DEFEAT MUST BE INFINITELY MORE IMPORTANT, THAN ONE WHO LOSES HIS POPULARITY WHEN HIS PEOPLE ARE VANQUISHED.

ISAIAH'S BRILLIANT LITERARY STYLE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR A RATHER CONFUSING CHANGE. IN HIS ANALOGY BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE SUFFERING SERVANT--ISRAEL HAS BECOME HE. IN THE 53rd CHAPTER HE SAYS "HE WAS DESPISED AND REJECTED BY MEN; A MAN OF SORROWS AND ACQUAINTED WITH GRIEF, HE WAS DESPISED AND WE ESTEEMED HIM NOT--HE HAS BORN OUR GRIEFS WITH HIS STRIPES WE ARE HEALED."

HERE ISAISH IS TALKING FOR THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH WHEN THEY FINALLY REALIZE THAT IN SUFFERING ISRAEL IS SHOWING THEM THE GLORY OF THE LORD, THAT IN PERSECUTION THEY ARE ACTUALLY WITNESSING TO HIS MERCY.

IF YOU REMEMBER THE SCRIPTURE READING THIS MORNING AND IF YOU HAVE BEEN FOLLOWING MY TRAIN OF THOUGHT YOU HAVE PROBABLY REALIZED THAT IN THIS DESCRIPTION OF THE SUFFERING SERVANT WE HAVE A FAIRLY ADEQUATE DESCRIPTION OR PROPHECY OF THE + the person of Jesus COMING OF THE MESSIAH. ALTHOUGH WE HAVE JUST SEEN THAT ISAIAH WAS EXPLAINING THE REASONS FOR THEIR SUFFERING TO THE ISRAELITES AND WAS NOT PRETENDING TO BE PROCLAIMING THE COMING OF JESUS, THE SIMILARITIES BETWEEN WHAT HE SAID AND WHAT HAPPENED 500 YEARS LATER ARE TOO GREAT TO BE IGNORED. BECAUSE OF THIS WE MUST, DURING ADVENT, TAKE A LONG LOOK AT ISAIAH AND AT THE SUFFERING SERVANT OF 550 B.C.

BUT FIRST LET'S CONSIDER THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING, WE TOO HAVE ASKED IT. IN A TIME OF TRAGEDY WE OFTEN THINK IF GOD LOVES US WHY HAS HE LET THIS HAPPEN? BEFORE WE BEGIN LET ME SAY THAT I DON'T HAVE THE ANSWER AND I GRAVELY MISTRUST ANYONE WHO PROFESSES TO HAVE IT. FOR THE MOMENT I WOULD JUST LIKE TO RAISE THE QUESTION AND SUGGEST A FEW OF THE ANSWERS MEN HAVE TRADITIONALLY GIVEN.

FIRSTLY THERE IS THE STOICAL ATTITUDE TOWARD PAIN AND SUFFERING. A TRUE STOIC SEES SUFFERING TO BE THE INEVITABLE RESULTS OF NATURE, AND MAN CANNOT AND SHOULD NOT DO ANYTHING TO AVOID IT. A STORY IS TOLD OF EPICTETUS, ONE OF THE FIRST STOIC PHILOSOPHERS, ~~A SLAVE HE~~ the way a slave WAS BEING PRODDED BY HIS MASTER TO DO A CERTAIN TASK. HE REFUSED WHERE UPON HIS MASTER BEGAN TWISTING HIS LEG.

YOU'RE GOING TO BREAK MY LEG CRIED EPICTETUS, AT WHICH POINT, SURE ENOUGH HIS MASTER BROKE THE LEG. THEN HE CALMLY REMARKED, "SEE I TOLD YOU SO." A MODERN VERSION OF STOICISM IS EPITOMIZED IN THE POPULAR SONG--WHAT EVER WILL BE WILL BE.

ANOTHER EXPLANATION THAT INCLUDES GOD AND HAS AT TIMES CALLED ITSELF CHRISTIAN SEES THE UNIVERSE AS A GIANT CLOCK, GOD IS THE CLOCK MAKER WHO BUILT IT, WOUND IT UP AND NOW IS JUST SITTING BACK WATCHING IT RUN DOWN. SUFFERING IS MERELY A RESULT OF MISHAPS IN THE MECHANICAL PROCESS OF RUNNING DOWN.

ON THE OTHER HAND PREDESTINARIANS ASSERT THAT EVERY THING IS DIVINELY PREORDAINED, THAT IF YOU WALK OUT OF YOUR HOUSE AND STEP IN FRONT OF A CAR IT HAS BEEN PLANNED THAT WAY.

OTHERS THINK THAT SUFFERING IS DIVINE PUNISHMENT FOR EVIL--AND--COMFORT AND WELL BEING THE REWARDS FOR BEING GOOD.

None of these seem adequate - none explain fully human reasoning is simply not sufficient

But → IF ONE LOOKS TO THE INSTANCES IN HISTORY WHERE MEN HAVE BEEN TRULY CREATIVE, INSTANCES WHERE GENIUS HAS SHOWN THROUGH IN LITERATURE, ART, OR MUSIC, MORE LIKELY THAN NOT ONE WILL FIND SOME SORT OF SUFFERING. AGONY, PHYSICAL OR MENTAL, SEEMS TO BE A CATYLIST, A PROMPTER FOR MEN TO REACH OUT BEYOND THEMSELVES: SUFFERING SEEMS TO FORCE MEN TO SEE REALITY THAT IS OTHERWISE HIDDEN.

TWO ARTISTS COME TO MY MIND, VINCENT VAN GOGH LED ONE OF THE MOST MISERABLE EXISTENCES EVER IMAGINED. HE WAS REALLY DESPISED AND REJECTED BY MEN, HE WAS EITHER IGNORED, OR RIDICULED BY EVERYONE WITH WHOM HE CAME IN CONTACT. AND AT THE SAME TIME THE LIFE HE PROJECTED ON CANVAS IS CLAIMED AS SOME OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST. Art

TALOUSE LATREC'S LIFE WAS EVEN WORSE, ADEFORMED ECCENTRIC HE TOO IS NOW CLAIMED AS A MASTER.

PETER TCHKAIVSKY POURED OUT THE ANGUISH AND TURMOIL IN HIS SOUL, ANDPRODUCED SOME OF THE WORLD'S MOST BEAUTIFUL MUSIC.

DOSTOEVSKI WHO WAS TORMENTED AND TORTURED BY ANXIETY AND GRIEF HAS BECOME ONE OF THE GREATEST FIGURES EVER TO WRITE A NOVEL.

AND THERE ARE MANY, MANY MORE/SUFFERING HAS PRODUCED BEAUTRY. ANGUISH AND TORTURE HAVE RESULTED IN WHAT APPEAR TO BE SUPER-HUMAN ACHIEVEMENTS. SUFFERING IS A PARADOX OF CREATION, THAT WE SIMPLY CAN'T SEEM TO UNDERSTAND AND YET SOMEHOW WE MUST TRY. WE MUST LOOK FOR THE HIDDEN BEAUTY THAT ACCOMPANIES SUFFERING: WE MUST SEARCH FOR THE BLESSEDNESS THAT ISAIAH SAW TO BE THE REWARD OF BEING THE SUFFERING SERVANT OF THE LORD.

BEFORE WE LEAVE THIS SUBJECT I WANT TO CALL YOUR ATTENTION TO THE MOST REMARKABLE DISPLAY OF SUFFERING THE WORLD HAS EVER KNOWN, ONE THAT HAS TAKEN PLACE

DURING OUR LIFE TIME. AGAIN IT IS THE SUFFERING SERVANT--ISRAEL. 2500 YEARS AFTER ISAIAH THE JEWS ENDURED A PERSECUTION SO HIDEOUS THAT IT SEEMS UNBELIEVABLE TODAY. 6,000,000 JEWS WERE MURDERED IN AN ALL OUT EFFORT TO RID THE WORLD OF THEIR RACE. THE MOST FEARSOME MILITARY MACHINE HISTORY HAD SEEN WAS BUILT AROUND A DEEP HATRED FOR THESE PEOPLE. AND TODAY SWASTIKA'S SHOW UP ON NEW YORK SYNAGOGUES, JEW'S ARE KEPT OUT OF ORGANIZATIONS, COLLEGES SET LIMITS ON THEIR NUMBER TO BE ADMITTED, AMERICANS CALL THEM KIKES, THEY ARE STILL RIDICULED AND DESPISED. A JEW IS STILL A MARKED MAN.

the fact?

CAN ONE READ THEIR HISTORY AND SEE ANYTHING BUT THE DIVINE? CAN THEIR FAITH AND THEIR VERY EXISTENCE BE ATTRIBUTED TO ANYTHING ELSE THAN THE LORD'S SUFFERING SERVANT? AREN'T WE BLIND WHEN WE FAIL TO SEE HERE SOMETHING MORE THAN A RACE THAT HAS HAD TOUGH LUCK?

Pause - CONNECTION BETWEEN ISAIAH AND CHRISTIANITY

THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THE GOSPEL WRITERS WERE WHOLHEARTEDLY CONVINCED THAT THERE WAS A CONNECTION BETWEEN ISAIAH'S SUFFERING SERVANT AND THEIR MASTER. MATTHEW, MARK AND LUKE ALL REFER DIRECTLY TO THE NARRATIVE BOOK OF ISAIAH--JESUS HIMSELF QUOTED PARTS OF THE SUFFERING SERVANT AND PROCLAIMED THAT HE WAS THE ONE ISAISH WAS TALKING ABOUT.

Narrative

IT IS A STRONG POSSIBILITY THAT JESUS WAS PROFOUNDLY INFLUENCED BY THE PROPHECY. PERHAPS IT WAS DUE TO THE INSPIRING WORDS OF ISAIAH THAT HE WILLINGLY

SUFFERED. PERHAPS IT WAS THE 53RD CHAPTER, OUR SCRIPTURE READING THIS MORNING, THAT REVEALED TO HIM THE PARADOXICAL FACT THAT MAN WAS TO BE REDEEMED BY SUFFERING: BY HIS SUFFERING AND DEATH.

YOU MIGHT BE ASKING AND RIGHTLY SO, IF ISAIAH DIDN'T INTEND TO PREDICT THE MESSIAH, IF THE SUFFERING SERVANT IS ISRAEL NOT JESUS AS HE REFERED TO HIM, WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH CHRISTMAS. IF THIS ~~IS~~ SO THEN ISAIAH ISN'T A PROPHET AT ALL BUT JUST A GOOD JEW COMMENTING ON THE HISTORY OF HIS PEOPLE.

THIS IS A VERY NATURAL REACTION, WHEN WE REALIZE WHY ISAIAH WROTE WHAT HE DID AND WHAT HE MEANT WE ARE PRONE TO DISCARD HIS BOOK AS MEANINGLESS TO CHRISTIANITY. IF HE WAS TALKING ABOUT THE JEWS AND NOT JESUS THEN HIS WRITINGS DON'T HAVE A PLACE IN AN ADVENT ~~XXXXXXX~~ SERMON.

IN OUR CONCLUDING MOMENTS THIS MORNING I HOPE I CAN EXPLAIN WHY ISAISH WAS A PROPHET, WHY HE IS IMMENSELY IMPORTANT IN OUR PREPARATION FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST.

I HAVE ALREADY MENTIONED THE INFLUENCE THE SUFFERING SERVANT IDEA HAD ON THE EARLY CHURCH AND ON JESUS HIMSELF. BUT WHAT IS MORE IMPORTANT IS THAT ISAIAH, IN SEARCHING (his soul for) AN ANSWER TO THE SUFFERING OF THE JEWS, GRASPED A SPIRITUAL TRUTH. HE WAS NOT ONLY TALKING ABOUT THE JEWS, HE WAS TALKING ABOUT GOD. WHILE

omnipotence + mercy

EXPLAINING THE JEW'S SUFFERING HE ALSO WAS AFFIRMING HIS BELIEFS IN THE ~~NATURE~~ OF ~~GOD~~ the Lord.

THE MEAT OF ISAISH'S PROPHECY IS THAT GOD WASN'T ENJOYING ISRAEL'S SUFFERING BUT HE WAS USING ISRAEL, THROUGH ITS SUFFERING TO REVEAL HIMSELF TO THE WORLD. BY ISRAEL'S STRIPES THE WORLD WOULD KNOW GOD, THEY WOULD BE ABLE TO SEE THE POSSIBILITY OF REDEEMPTION BECAUSE THE DOWN TRODDEN AND DESPISED ISRAEL WAS THE SERVANT OF THE LORD. ISAISH TELLS US THAT WE NEEDN'T LOOK FOR GOD TO DEFEAT NATIONS, ELEVATE CHRISTIANITY TO A WORLD POWER, BUT THAT WE MORE APPROPRIATELY MIGHT SEE HIM IN SUFFERING.

THIS IS ALL CLIMAXED BY THE BIRTH, SUFFERING AND DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST. ISAIAH IS ALL THE MORE IMPORTANT BECAUSE HIS WITNESS TO THE WILL OF GOD WAS DUPLICATED BY ANOTHER MAN 500 YEARS LATER. THIS MAN, INSTEAD OF POINTING TO A PEOPLE AS THE REVELATION OF GOD POINTED TO HIMSELF.

BECAUSE ISAIAH UNDERSTOOD HOW THE LORD WOULD REDEEM THE WORLD HE CERTAINLY IS A PROPHET OF JESUS CHRIST: BECAUSE HE UNDERSTOOD THAT THROUGH SUFFERING GOD'S WILL FOR MAN MIGHT BE UNDERSTOOD HE MOST CERTAINLY HAS AN IMPORTANT PLACE IN OUR ADVENT PREPARATION.

THE ~~MEKY~~ BABY BORN IN BETHLEHEM, GREW UP TO PROVE ISAIAH'S WORDS: THE STORY OF HIS PASSION WAS PRECEDED BY A NARRATIVE THAT DESCRIBED THE LORD'S

SERVANT AS SUFFERING, DESPISED, BEARING THE SINS OF MANY.

ISAIAH DIDN'T KNOW HOW THE LORD WOULD FINALLY REDEEM MAN, WHETHER HE WOULD ALWAYS USE ISRAEL, OR WHETHER HE WOULD REVEAL HIMSELF IN A DIFFERENT FASHION. HE DIDN'T KNOW THAT THE SUFFERING SERVANT WOULD BECOME JESUS THE CHRIST. ~~BUT HE DID KNOW~~ Isaiah knew + wrote THAT THE SERVANT WOULD REVEAL GOD, HE KNEW AS WE ~~DO~~ know THAT "~~XX~~ WITH HIS STRIPES WE ARE HEALED."

~~The God revealed By J.C. is the same described by Isaiah.~~ the servant Israel)

He knew that, ~~that~~ (pe. it was God's mode of making himself known — the righteous, mercy + compassion of God can be seen in a servant that will fully suffers.

We know the same because of Jesus Christ, - who truly was a suffering servant who fulfilled + proved Isaiah's testimony to the nature of God